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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2366 (2017), in which the Council established the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and requested me to report on its activities every 90 days, as well as resolution 2381 (2017), in which it authorized the Mission to monitor the temporary, bilateral, national ceasefire between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) (ELN). The report covers the period from 27 December 2017 to 26 March 2018.

II. Major developments

Congressional elections

2. The congressional elections held on 11 March 2018 illustrated the positive impact of the end of the conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) on the political process in Colombia. The campaign was not without incident, but political participation rose by approximately 5.2 per cent, with 3.6 million more voters compared with the elections of 2014. Voting increased in every department, and, in the 10 departments historically most affected by the conflict, 817,045 more people voted than in 2014. An additional 9,709 polling places were established, and not one had to be relocated owing to security concerns. ELN held to its commitment of a unilateral halt to offensive operations during the electoral period, and the Government launched the national plan for electoral guarantees, which included the deployment of 187,000 police and military personnel.

3. These elections were the first in which the People's Alternative Revolutionary Force (FARC) political party participated, with 73 candidates, and former members of FARC-EP voted without significant incident, representing a landmark in their political reintegration. In keeping with the Peace Agreement, FARC will be represented in the next Congress, with five seats in the 172-member Chamber of Representatives and five seats in the 108-member Senate. The main political parties saw changes in their representation, but no single party achieved an absolute majority.

Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition

4. On 15 March, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the justice component of the transitional justice system, opened its doors to the public, marking another step

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forward. Magistrates of the Special Jurisdiction began consideration of the cases presented by 6,094 members of the former FARC-EP, 1,792 members of the armed forces, 44 civil servants and 6 private citizens. The expeditious approval by Congress of the procedures of the Special Jurisdiction is an important pending step.

5. In February, the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, issued three decrees establishing the Special Unit for the Search for Persons deemed as missing and appointed its Director, who announced that the Unit would begin its investigations to locate more than 60,000 people reported missing as a result of the conflict.

6. The Commission on Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, established in December 2017, has focused on beginning operations and establishing regional presence, coordinating with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Special Unit for the Search for Persons deemed as missing and opening dialogue with social and other institutional actors, such as the National Centre for Historical Memory, the Ministries of Justice and Defence, the armed forces, the private sector and victims', women's and indigenous organizations.

Legislation

7. The current Government intends to put before Congress, which returned on 20 March from a three-month recess, key peace-related bills, with a request for their consideration as a matter of urgency.

Other developments related to the implementation of the Peace Agreement

8. After achieving consensus in the Commission for the Follow-up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, at the end of 2017, the Government issued a 15-year framework plan for the implementation of the Final Agreement. It includes the geographical targeting of benefits, estimated costs and government revenue sources, and FARC commitments.

9. On 1 March, the Constitutional Court upheld the constitutionality of the amnesty law passed in December 2016, but with some new conditions that have been criticized by FARC. The corresponding communiqué, in keeping with prior court rulings, made the benefits accruing to former FARC-EP members and State agents conditional upon their full cooperation with the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition.

10. On 19 February, the Office of the Attorney General announced an investigation into businesses, allegedly linked to former FARC-EP members, that were accused of illicit enrichment and laundering money through supermarkets amounting to some $230 million. Some of the supermarkets were subsequently looted. FARC denied links to those businesses and expressed concern that the assets that it had declared on 15 August 2017, as required by the Peace Agreement, which it estimated were worth $323 million, were at risk of being lost as a result of the insufficient measures taken to secure them.

III. Mission tasks: reintegration of former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army: security, legal and socioeconomic guarantees

11. In January, the Government identified a series of measures for overcoming, during the following three months, outstanding issues relating to the security, legal

and socioeconomic guarantees for the reintegration of former FARC-EP members. In relation to security, the goals included the deployment to all 26 territorial areas for training and reintegration of close protection teams available to former combatants wishing to travel outside the security perimeter provided by police and military forces. With regard to legal guarantees, the goals included the resolution of the situation of former FARC-EP members who were still in prison and the registration of hundreds of former combatants who were not yet accredited by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace and were therefore unable to receive the benefits of the reintegration process. With regard to socioeconomic guarantees, the goals included access to landownership, the effective establishment of FARC cooperatives and the promotion of productive projects in all territorial areas. Much effort, often carried out in a tripartite manner with the Government, FARC representatives and the Mission, went into reaching those objectives.

A. Security guarantees for former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army

Security of the territorial areas

12. Public security forces continued to implement checkpoints and security perimeters around all territorial areas. Proactive efforts were undertaken by the military, the police and the National Protection Unit to address growing tensions with former combatants in Charras and Colinas (Guaviare Department). In Cauca, tensions between deployed security personnel and indigenous communities remain an important challenge. Additional tensions have emerged as a result of the expansion of dissident and other illegal armed groups in the proximity of some territorial areas, in particular in the departments of Meta, Guaviare and Cauca, where they have carried out attacks against the national police. Since September 2017, five police officers have been killed and others seriously injured in such attacks.

13. The inter-institutional "Blue Tent" initiative, led by the armed forces, aims to coordinate State agencies responsible for security in the communities surrounding the territorial areas. It has been implemented in all territorial areas, with varying degrees of success. Throughout areas that have been battlegrounds for decades and where illegal armed groups continue to operate, there is lingering apprehension among communities about close association with military forces and the fear that cooperation with public security forces could make them a target. The legitimacy and effectiveness of stabilization efforts by the Government in former conflict zones would be enhanced by pairing efforts to provide security with a stronger presence of civilian authorities and agencies providing needed services to communities.

Close protection

14. During the reporting period, the Mission registered the killings of 13 former FARC-EP members and 5 relatives, bringing the total number of such killings since the signing of the Peace Agreement to 44 former FARC-EP members and 18 relatives. This does not include the six former combatants who disappeared in October 2017. All killings took place outside the territorial areas, hence the importance of broadening security guarantees beyond perimeter security. The National Protection Unit has set up collective protection teams in all territorial areas to provide close

protection to former FARC-EP members who leave the territorial areas temporarily, especially for political activities or to promote the coca substitution programme.[1]

15. To date, the National Protection Unit has trained and recruited 935 persons, including 545 former FARC-EP members, of whom 84 are women. A third and final training course is pending to reach the total of 1,200 persons trained and recruited provided for in the Peace Agreement. The course will include a module on gender issues in risk analysis and protection, supported by the FARC Gender Committee, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Mission.

Security of the political campaign of the People's Alternative Revolutionary Force

16. During the campaign period, which began on 28 January 2018, according to official figures, the FARC political party carried out 101 activities and experienced 17 incidents, including 3 against regional party headquarters. Owing to limits on available personnel and vehicles of the National Protection Unit, only 29 of the 73 FARC congressional candidates received individual close protection during the campaign. In order to respond to the needs of the remaining 44 candidates, the National Protection Unit implemented collective schemes in four cities. In addition, on 20 February, the national police, the National Protection Unit (including former FARC-EP members) and the Mission established a tripartite protection and security mechanism to coordinate and monitor prevention and protection measures for FARC political party members. The mechanism has established 1 national and 10 regional and subregional headquarters in areas where FARC party activities have been concentrated and has a road map to address specific risks for women involved in political activities. It was the main coordination mechanism for the deployment of protection and security measures on election day. No significant security incident took place that day.

17. As mentioned in my previous report (S/2017/1117), a sizeable number of former combatants have left the territorial areas and are increasingly dispersed. Several new collective settlements have been registered by the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, many in rural areas where FARC-EP was present prior to the concentration of its forces, heightening the importance of the overall protection of communities in conflict-affected regions as provided for in section 3.4 of the Peace Agreement.

B. Legal guarantees

18. Accreditation is a prerequisite for the application of the amnesty law and the benefits of reintegration. By 15 August 2017, FARC-EP had submitted a list of more than 14,000 former members. By December, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace had accredited about 11,900 former FARC-EP members on that list. With a view to completing the process for the estimated remainder of more than 2,000 former FARC-EP members, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, FARC and the Mission implemented a tripartite plan from mid-January to mid-March 2018, leading to the accreditation of about 1,000 former FARC-EP members in the territorial areas. The corresponding notifications are being issued. The next steps include a joint visit to the territorial area of La Variante, where as many as 400 former combatants may be eligible for accreditation, the further review of pending cases in other territorial

[1] The National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops, which is provided for in item 4 of the Peace Agreement, is supported and monitored by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

areas and the review of about 400 former FARC-EP members who are still in prison without accreditation.

19. At the time of the signing of the Peace Agreement, an estimated 3,500 former FARC-EP members, approximately 8 per cent of whom are women, were in prison for conflict-related crimes. To date, about 2,600 of them have been released, meaning that, 15 months after the adoption of the amnesty law, one quarter of FARC-EP prisoners are still pending judicial review, notwithstanding the joint efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace and the Mission. With support from the international community and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a team of lawyers is working to accelerate the judicial review of cases involving FARC members. Although the issue is complex, the failure to implement more fully the amnesty law marks a low point in the reintegration process. Every effort should be made to resolve outstanding cases.

C. Socioeconomic reintegration

20. In the past three months, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace and the Ministries of Education, Health, Environment and Labour have made significant efforts to advance early reinsertion objectives. At present, 11,507 (96.7 per cent) of accredited ex-combatants have access to a bank account, 11,729 (99 per cent) have received one-time reintegration allowances and 10,335 (87 per cent) receive monthly stipends.

21. At the same time, six months after the completion of the laying down of arms, it is urgent for former FARC-EP members to see viable pathways for their medium- and long-term reintegration. Lack of progress in this respect is in good part responsible for the movement of former FARC-EP members outside the territorial areas, hence the growing importance of access to land, the design, funding and implementation of viable productive projects linked to local development and the creation of cooperatives to implement them.

22. Looking ahead to the medium-term challenges, I reiterate the need for the National Reintegration Council to adopt, as provided for in the Peace Agreement, its national reintegration plan linking reintegration to development. Staffing the technical unit for reintegration in the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization would improve the implementation of reintegration initiatives. Territorial councils for reintegration with the participation of local authorities have been created in each territorial area, but they have not yet been able to link effectively reintegration and local development.

Conditions in the territorial areas

23. Living and working conditions in the territorial areas are a significant success factor in the reintegration process. Most territorial areas are located in remote rural municipalities with limited access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The Government built temporary drinking water plants and septic wells in 25 of 26 territorial areas. These facilities have recurring maintenance issues that the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace has been resolving, but there are outstanding problems in the territorial areas of La Variante in Nariño, Llano Grande in Antioquia and Yari in Meta. At least four territorial areas have limited electricity, and food deliveries have also experienced some interruptions. The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, the Ministry of Health and the Mission established a working group that meets regularly to respond to infrastructure and services bottlenecks. In March, the Office of the High

Commissioner for Peace began work in six territorial areas, including the construction of classrooms and upgrades to water supply, sewage and drainage.

24. In a welcome development, the Government announced that water, electricity, sanitation and maintenance services would continue beyond March 2018, until August 2019. Health services would continue until 31 December 2018, with programmes adjusted to specific needs. Lastly, and of particular importance, an agreement was reached by the parties on 23 March to extend the provision of basic food supplies to the territorial areas for another three months. The supply of food had been scheduled to stop on 31 March. As access to land and long-term productive projects have not yet materialized, access to food is an important incentive for former FARC-EP members to remain in the territorial areas, thus making it possible for the Government and FARC, with the support of the international community, to continue to carry out an orderly reintegration process.

New settlements

25. As noted in paragraph 17, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization has identified several rural settlements where groups of former combatants are currently living and implementing collective projects. The Agency has deployed 106 facilitators in the surrounding municipalities to support those outside the territorial areas. The Agency's decision to support the new settlements of Uribe (Meta Department) and Mutatá (Antioquia Department), where approximately 250 ex-combatants have relocated, is welcome. The Agency estimates that more than 1,000 former FARC-EP combatants will require support for their individual reintegration.

26. The dispersion of former combatants is creating new challenges. While the focus on territorial area-based reintegration remains essential and will hopefully trigger the return of former combatants to the territorial areas, a broader community-based approach at the municipal and departmental levels will become increasingly important. The National Reintegration Council, government agencies and the international community should take these evolving requirements into account.

Productive reintegration

27. More than 100 productive initiatives are currently at various stages of implementation in the territorial areas. They are designed, implemented and funded primarily by former FARC-EP members from their reintegration allowances and monthly subsidies. Some operate with technical or financial assistance from government agencies, universities, local authorities and international donors. Unfortunately, the formal mechanism established by the Peace Agreement to formulate and finance productive projects has been ineffective. The Peace Agreement provides that, following the approval by the National Reintegration Council of productive projects, an amount of 8 million pesos (about $2,800) is granted to each participating former FARC-EP member. As at February, only one such project (in Miravalle, Caquetá Department) had been approved.

28. The following three priorities were set during the past three months: the opening of bank accounts for all 51 cooperatives established so far, the approval and funding by the National Reintegration Council of productive projects in all territorial areas and the issuance of norms enabling land acquisition by former FARC-EP members.

Cooperatives

29. Some progress has been made on the creation of the national cooperative, known as Ecomun, and local cooperatives. A total of 51 cooperatives were created, with 3,070 members. The Ministry of Labour and the National Vocational Training Service have trained and certified 5,433 former FARC-EP members in solidarity economics,

and international resources have been identified for the 1,400 more who expressed interest in the course. Only a few cooperatives, however, have met all the legal and operational requirements, in particular the opening of bank accounts. The Superintendent of Banks is expected to issue shortly a decree that should pave the way for the prompt opening of bank accounts for all cooperatives.

Access to land

30. In line with his decision in December 2017, the President is expected to publicize soon for comment a draft decree enabling access to landownership for former combatants in the process of reintegration. Once adopted, this landmark decree will offer possibly the strongest incentive for former FARC-EP members with a farming background, who are the majority, to continue with the reintegration process. This could only be implemented after the presidential elections, however, owing to restrictions on government contracting during the electoral campaign. The Government is proposing an additional option, the purchase of land as part of the funding of productive projects, which could be implemented immediately.

31. The National Land Agency has so far identified 76 plots of land (14 within the territorial areas and 62 in close proximity) fit for purchase and agricultural production. The assignment of land should advance without further delay.

Productive projects

32. As mentioned above, progress in the design of productive projects and their approval and funding by the National Reintegration Council has been inadequate. The work of the technicians designated by FARC in 2017 to formulate projects in the 26 territorial areas has been slow, and, as a result, only four projects have been presented and one approved by the Council. Faced with this critical situation, in early March 2018, UNDP, with the support of the Council, FARC and the Mission, urgently deployed specialists to complete the formulation process. The goal is to approve 13 projects in March and the remainder in April and May. In addition, after three months of training, 350 former combatants have graduated as agricultural technicians.

33. Current reintegration efforts lack a gender perspective, and comprehensive initiatives that are tailored to the needs of FARC-EP women and ensure their full participation and leadership are required. Former FARC-EP women continue to develop their own initiatives. For example, in the territorial area of Agua Bonita, women have designed two projects, a tailoring shop and the production of pineapple-related products. In the territorial area of Llano Grande, a group of 34 former FARC-EP women opened a community restaurant. In the territorial area of Santa Lucía, a group of 20 women launched a bakery with technical support from the National Vocational Training Service. In the territorial area of Los Monos (Cauca), a group of former FARC-EP indigenous women implemented a project to make artisanal products and are planning to include women from nearby indigenous reserves. Similar efforts are being made in other territorial areas but require technical and financial support.

34. Productive reintegration is benefiting from the increasing mobilization by Member States, United Nations entities, including UNDP, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UN-Women, the Mine Action Service and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and international non-governmental organizations. The Colombia donors group, coordinated by the European Union, has prioritized reintegration. The Technical Board on International Cooperation, established by the National Reintegration Council in February, should contribute to the further promotion and harmonization of international cooperation. Efforts to establish the

demining organization, Humanicemos, which aims to employ up to 146 former FARC-EP members, continue with support from the Mine Action Service.

Health and education

35. At present, 11,475 former FARC-EP members (96 per cent of those accredited; 8,980 men and 2,495 women) across 488 municipalities are registered with the health-care system, an increase of 1,112 in the first quarter of 2018. The Ministry of Health and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace established new protocols to overcome difficulties in registering former FARC-EP members with the health-care system. The technical working group on health of the National Reintegration Council, which met weekly, increased the attention given to 35 urgent cases and enhanced service delivery in general.

36. Notwithstanding the extension of health services to the territorial areas, in some territorial areas, no doctors were deployed in January and February. The issue has now been resolved in all territorial areas with the exception of Vidrí in Chocó Department. Other territorial areas reported a shortfall of medicines.

37. Despite these challenges, former FARC-EP members and neighbouring communities that traditionally had limited access to health care are benefiting from the temporary health facilities in the territorial areas. A robust contingency plan to address health-care needs for territorial areas and communities in the mid- to long-term will be important as part of a rural health strategy for the most vulnerable regions.

38. With a view to longer-term solutions, the Ministry of Health, in coordination with IOM, the United Nations Population Fund and the Pan American Health Organization, has sponsored the "Health for Peace" programme in the 26 municipalities with territorial areas, to strengthen the capacities of health-care professionals and community leaders, including former combatants.

39. The health insurance provider for former FARC-EP members has scheduled 1,160 specialized medical appointments for 326 pregnant women in the territorial areas. Unfortunately, in many rural hospitals near the territorial areas, obstetrical services are deficient or non-existent and women continue to face serious difficulties in obtaining those services or access to a maternity ward owing to high transportation costs. The provision of and access to services that ensure the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive rights remain a major challenge. Former FARC-EP members with disabilities face similar challenges, as therapy centres and providers of specialized attention are available mainly in distant departmental capitals.

40. With regard to education, it is important to establish an integrated strategy in line with the commitments outlined by the Ministry of Education in the framework of the National Reintegration Council. Demand is growing for higher education as primary and secondary education programmes enter their second year of implementation. The Ministry of Education and FARC are collaborating on a joint higher education plan, in collaboration with public and private universities. Under the flexible model of primary and secondary education implemented by the Ministry of Education and international partners, 3,418 former FARC-EP members were enrolled in 2017 and approximately 1,831 registered in 2018.

D. Political reintegration

41. The newly established FARC party has emerged from the congressional elections in March with national responsibilities through the five members of the Senate, two of whom are women, and the five members of the Chamber of Representatives who will take office when the new Congress is inaugurated on 20 July 2018. The transition of FARC from conflict to politics has consolidated the peace process but was not exempt from obstacles, some of which put FARC at a disadvantage compared with other political parties.

42. In December 2017, during the registration of candidates, the Registrar challenged whether the amnesty that covered crimes committed by FARC members during the conflict also removed obstacles to their political participation. The review by the Constitutional Court of the law establishing the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition helped to clarify the issue. In contrast, the registration of FARC voters went relatively smoothly, even though the former FARC-EP members who were not yet accredited were unable to vote. To date, the National Registrar has registered all FARC-EP members accredited by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace.

43. The provision of public funding for the party's operations and its electoral campaigns was also problematic. Initially, the party was denied its request to open a bank account because its legal representatives were included on international sanctions lists. It was only on 23 January 2018 that the Agrarian Bank agreed to open an account. In March, legal and bureaucratic procedures further delayed the availability of funds transferred by the Agrarian Bank to the political party until 1 March, 10 days before the closing of the campaign. This clearly undermined the ability of FARC to campaign. Delays in financial disbursement from the National Electoral Council also affected other political parties.

44. While the inauguration of FARC regional headquarters and the launch of the campaign in Bogotá and in several regions unfolded without incident, the start of the campaign activities themselves was marked by several acts of vandalism against FARC offices and harassment in public rallies. Some acts of violence also took place against other parties, illustrating the polarized political environment.

45. The most serious incident took place on 16 January, when two former combatants were killed as they campaigned in the municipality of Peque (Antioquia Department). The Mission issued a public condemnation of the killings, the first such event in the electoral campaign. The Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General issued arrest warrants for the suspected perpetrators.

46. Owing to the overall security environment and the lack of funds, the FARC party suspended its campaign from 9 to 23 February. In the latter phase of the campaign, the number of incidents dropped, and, as mentioned earlier, election day unfolded without significant incident. On 8 March, owing to the health condition of its presidential candidate, Rodrigo Londoño, FARC withdrew from the presidential campaign.

E. Security of communities, organizations and leaders in the areas most affected by the conflict

47. In my previous report, I pointed out that the increased insecurity in several areas affected by the conflict was the most serious challenge of the post-agreement phase.

In 2017, a total of 121 human rights defenders and social and community leaders were killed.[2]

48. I am concerned that, by all accounts, the killing of community leaders and human rights defenders has continued unabated in the past three months, despite several measures to address the alarming number of killings registered in 2017. This trend and the proliferation of illegal armed actors associated with it should be brought under control as a matter of urgency, as has been acknowledged by the President and top officials of his Government.

49. Of particular concern are the attacks against persons working to implement government programmes related to coca substitution and land restitution. Members of local community boards, the governance mechanism established in rural districts, are among the main targets of violence. This underscores the importance of expanding protection efforts from the individual protection of people at risk to the collective security of groups and communities, as provided for in Decree 2078 of 2017. Protection efforts should also be expanded to cover the specific protection challenges of women in communities through measures for enhanced prevention of and response to gender-based violence.

50. On 28 February 2018, the Ombudsman issued a nationwide early warning identifying community and social leaders and human rights defenders as populations at risk. He noted that 49 per cent of all cases from 2017 through February 2018 had occurred in four regions: Cauca, Urabá, Antioquia and Norte de Santander. In his alert, he identified seven factors common to many of the leaders killed, namely, their involvement in defending land and natural resources, in implementing the Peace Agreement, in particular the coca substitution programme and the formulation of rural development plans, in land restitution and the return of displaced people, in defending land against private interests, in denouncing drug dealing, the presence of illegal armed actors and the use of children and adolescents in marginalized urban areas, in protesting against specific investments of public resources and in political participation in the current electoral period. The Ombudsman observed an expansion of illegal armed groups and a growing number of clashes among them, resulting in an increase in massive displacements. Such displacements were reported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during the first two months of 2018.

51. The Office of the Ombudsman has issued an additional 27 regional early warnings, signalling risks in 45 municipalities across 14 departments. Of those early warnings, three highlighted risks of sexual violence and five highlighted risks of child recruitment. The Office stressed that most risks are due to competition for control of the territories where the production and trafficking of drugs and illegal mining are taking place. Business interests surrounding infrastructure and agricultural megaprojects were a secondary source of risk. Social leaders have been killed in 33 of those 45 municipalities.

52. Overall, the Ombudsman's warnings show the extent to which attacks against communities and leaders are directly linked to attempts to control resources, in particular land and agriculture, through violence. Such findings point to the current preponderance of economic motives in patterns of violence in rural areas and should

[2] In its annual report covering 2017 (A/HRC/37/3/Add.3), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights registered a total of 121 killings of human rights defenders, including social and community leaders. Fatalities included 84 human rights defenders with leadership roles, 23 members of social and political movements and 14 people killed during social protests. A total of 14 of the fatalities were women, twice the number registered the previous year.

help State institutions to refine their strategies against criminal organizations, in support of the stabilization of the areas most affected by the conflict.

53. At the end of 2017, the Government approved various new instruments in an effort to address the deterioration of the security situation and the pattern of killings in former conflict zones, including a stronger early warning system, a more robust institutional response to the warnings, the reinforcement of the Office of the Attorney General through the establishment of a new Special Investigation Unit and the adoption of plan "Horus" for the deployment of security forces in the rural areas at risk. The Mission has been supporting these efforts wherever appropriate.

Response to the early warnings of the Ombudsman

54. In order to accelerate the institutional response to the Ombudsman's early warning system and strengthen prevention in keeping with the Peace Agreement, the Government of Colombia established, in December 2017, the Intersectoral Commission for Rapid Response to Early Warnings, comprising the Ministers of Interior and Defence, the Commander-in-Chief of the military forces, the Head of the National Protection Unit, the Director of the national police and the Head of the victims unit. The Ombudsman, the Attorney General, the Inspector General, the High Counsellor for Post-Conflict, Human Rights and Security and the Presidential Counsellor for Human Rights also participate as invitees. This is a welcome development, as is the effort of State agencies to collaborate, with an increased capacity to track situations through regional and local committees. The Intersectoral Commission meets at the national and local levels, and the Mission participated in 24 of its 32 sessions.

Plan "Horus"

55. The lack of a permanent presence of security and civilian institutions in the territories most affected by the conflict contributes to the insecurity of communities. In my previous report, I noted positively the announcement of a new stabilization strategy, plan "Horus", including the redeployment of public security forces in 595 rural districts in 13 high-priority and 54 medium-priority municipalities. Its objectives are to regain control of areas where a number of indicators converge, including the presence of illegal armed groups, the killing of community leaders, illegal economies and early warnings by the Office of the Ombudsman, to establish a long-term presence that builds confidence with communities and to facilitate the provision of goods and services by civilian agencies.

56. The plan provides for regular assessments of its effectiveness in collaboration with the Mission. The implementation of the plan is still at an early stage and, despite efforts, is facing a number of challenges, including the daunting logistical requirements of establishing a permanent presence in a large number of very remote districts, the problematic deployment of light military and police units in areas where illegal armed groups are actively confronting security forces, the concern expressed by the communities that observed an increase in the deployment of security personnel that it might be temporary, making them reluctant to cooperate with the security forces for fear of subsequent retaliation from criminal organizations, and the fact that, where the communities' livelihoods depend essentially on coca growing or illegal mining, their aspiration to be protected by security forces against the violence of illegal armed groups clashes with their fear that the State presence will undermine their economic survival. Throughout areas affected by both violence and extreme poverty, the implementation of the plan and the expansion of the State presence would be considerably strengthened if the provision of security went hand in hand with the delivery of goods and services by civilian agencies.

Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General

57. The Special Investigation Unit, whose director was appointed in December 2017, has made progress in the characterization of illegal armed groups and criminal structures operating in the areas vacated by FARC-EP. The Unit has prioritized the deployment of multidisciplinary teams in Apartadó, Medellín, Popayán, Pasto and Tumaco. The Mission has established a close dialogue with the Unit.

58. In its first phase, the Unit has rightly focused on the killings of former FARC-EP members and their relatives, which were not adequately addressed in 2017. Its investigations have led to 21 arrest warrants against individuals linked to three structures involved in 20 murders and disappearances: Clan del Golfo, ELN and FARC-EP dissident groups. The Police Elite Corps, established under the Peace Agreement, has been supporting the Unit's investigations.

59. Among State institutions, the Ombudsman and the Attorney General have taken a welcome lead in the analysis of the context of violence in the conflict areas and sharpened the focus on criminal groups involved in the killing of community and social leaders.

National Commission on Security Guarantees

60. The National Commission on Security Guarantees, chaired by the President, has overall responsibility for the design and supervision of a State-wide policy to respond to the threat of illegal groups and dismantle organized crime in accordance with the Peace Agreement. It includes the Vice-President, Óscar Naranjo, the principals of all the agencies involved in security matters, the Presidential Counsellor for Human Rights, the Attorney General, the Inspector General and the Ombudsman. Four representatives of well-known civil society organizations are full members, and the Organization of American States, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Verification Mission participate as observers. The activities of the Commission have intensified, and the regular reports of the Attorney General have led to a substantive discussion of the evolving patterns of violence in the territories. The Subcommission on Security Guarantees is holding meetings in prioritized areas, gathering the perspectives of community members and local authorities. The recurring sources of insecurity highlighted in its sessions include the proliferation of armed groups, the lack of economic opportunities and high levels of corruption and impunity.

61. The Commission has also put in place four thematic committees focused on regional, gender and ethnic perspectives, financing sources, normative changes and the impact of the response of institutions. Women's organizations have requested effective representation in the Commission to ensure that their perspectives are reflected in its work.

F. Ceasefire between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional

62. The temporary bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Government of Colombia and ELN expired on 9 January 2018. Despite numerous calls to preserve the marked reduction in violence that prevailed during the temporary ceasefire, ELN resumed military action on 10 January, which led the Government to suspend its participation in the talks. Several days later, amid a lull in the level of violence on the ground, the chief negotiators of both parties met again in Quito to discuss, among others, the prospect of negotiating a new ceasefire. In that context, on 25 January, in a joint letter to my Special Representative, they requested his assessment of the

temporary ceasefire and his recommendations for an improved agreement. In a letter dated 8 February, my Special Representative underscored the positive impact of the ceasefire for communities in conflict-affected areas and for the legitimacy of the peace process. He outlined the main shortcomings of the temporary ceasefire agreement, in particular the fundamental differences on the definition of offensive action, the scope of the humanitarian commitments and the role of the monitoring and verification mechanism. His recommendations included the need for a more robust political dialogue, the implementation of concrete, achievable and verifiable confidence-building measures, an immediate de-escalation of hostilities and the negotiation of a longer-term ceasefire with the participation of the designated verification entity so as to provide guarantees of effective implementation.

63. On 27 January, a bombing attack by ELN against a police station in the city of Barranquilla left 7 police officers dead and more than 40 wounded, leading the Government to suspend again its participation in the talks. The armed forces, which have been involved in actions against ELN since the end of the ceasefire, were instructed to respond forcefully. On 30 January, the armed forces bombed an ELN camp in Choco Department and, in the following days, announced the capture of ELN members.

64. Following the end of the temporary ceasefire, broad sectors of Colombian society expressed in strong terms their rejection of violence and their demand for a peaceful solution to the conflict. On 26 February, ELN announced a unilateral cessation of offensive military actions from 9 to 13 March to allow the elections to take place undisturbed. On 12 March, the President announced that he had instructed his negotiating team to return to Quito, noting national and international encouragement for the resumption of talks. On 15 March, the fifth round of the peace talks began, and the delegations issued a joint statement outlining their agenda: the participation of society in the building of peace, an assessment of the temporary ceasefire and negotiations on a new ceasefire, the promotion of a humanitarian agreement in Choco, progress towards demining and public outreach to enhance the understanding of the peace process. The fifth round is scheduled to end on 18 May.

G. Cross-cutting issues

Gender mainstreaming and engagement with women's groups

65. The implementation of the specific gender provisions regarding security guarantees and reintegration has been limited. Their implementation must be prioritized and adequately resourced to enable positive and differentiated actions for the adequate reintegration of former FARC-EP women and the security of women in the communities. The working group on gender of the National Reintegration Council, with which the Mission coordinates closely, has promoted steps towards gender-sensitive reintegration, including a situational analysis of women who are former combatants and the design of a gender strategy for reintegration. The working group, together with the Special High-level Forum for Women, plays a critical part in ensuring that the needs of women are met and that a gender perspective is mainstreamed.

66. The Mission, together with UN-Women, continues to strengthen its dialogue with women's organizations and to address their recommendations. At the regional level, the Mission is fostering dialogue between former FARC-EP women and women from nearby communities. On International Women's Day, the Mission supported more than 15 events in territorial areas and nearby communities to foster dialogue and reconciliation.

67. The Mission currently has, across its field offices, a network of 41 gender focal points, who have been promoting coordination among women's organizations, government counterparts, FARC gender focal points and United Nations agencies.

Child protection

68. The Mission continues to liaise with the Presidential Counsellor for Human Rights on the implementation of the Government-led reintegration programme entitled "A different path of life" for children associated with the former FARC-EP. The Mission is following up on the cases of 21 children of the 135 who were formally released from FARC-EP ranks. Challenges to their reintegration include barriers for children under 18 years of age to obtaining financial support owing to the legal requirement of having an adult guardian, adolescents facing delays in the transition to the reintegration programme for adults and difficulties in providing attention to those who decided to live within a territorial area. Some of those obstacles have been overcome, and the Mission observed that eight of those children had made progress in education, eight had received financial support and the majority had obtained proper identification documents. In February, the National Reintegration Council began to prepare detailed guidelines for the reintegration of children, including indicators, a follow-up strategy and a psychological support strategy for the reintegration programme. It is important to ensure the proper implementation of those guidelines. A clear and widely disseminated guide on the transition to the adult programme is needed. To date, 83 of the participants in the programme are over the age of 18, and 114 will reach that age by the end of the year.

69. There is a lack of specialized attention and adequate facilities for children of former FARC-EP members living in the territorial areas. For example, only two territorial areas have fully functional day-care facilities for children. The Mission is coordinating with the Colombian Family Welfare Institute and UNICEF to improve their living conditions. In some territorial areas, the Institute has supported the access of children to education, health and recreation. Modest progress has been made with regard to their inclusion in social programmes planned for their parents. The Government's launch, in 166 municipalities, of a comprehensive programme to prevent child recruitment by illegal groups is a welcome development.

Ethnic and indigenous issues

70. Modest progress has been made in the integration of ethnic and cultural perspectives into the reintegration process and the provision of security guarantees. The High-level Forum of Ethnic Peoples established under the Peace Agreement lacks resources. In a decision in December 2017, the Constitutional Court upheld the right of Yukpa people to prior consultation on the location of the territorial area of San José de Oriente and requested the Government to review the matter. Four pieces of legislation submitted to Congress under fast-track procedures were consulted with indigenous and ethnic organizations.

71. A positive step under way is the preparation of a decree for the reintegration of 3,003 indigenous former combatants. It will be important for the National Reintegration Council to ensure that indigenous former combatants are able to enjoy comparable rights and opportunities to other former FARC-EP members and to strengthen the security and self-protection systems of ethnic peoples, such as the Indigenous Guard and the Cimarrona Guard, and ensure their effective coordination with the security forces.

72. The Mission continues to maintain dialogue with ethnic organizations and to support the inclusion of ethnic perspectives by the national implementing bodies. The Mission has recruited an adviser on ethnic and indigenous affairs.

II. Liaison and coordination, including the United Nations country team

73. The Mission continues its regular dialogue with a wide range of sectors, including national, regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, the private sector and the international community.

74. Through this engagement, the Mission has facilitated reconciliation efforts in several regions. For example, in Valledupar, the Mission has facilitated encounters between local landowners, victims and former combatants; in Medellín, it accompanied dialogues between opposing political leaders; and in Villavicencio, it has promoted encounters between the private sector and FARC.

75. In support of consolidating the peace process, the Mission has continued its engagement with sectors that are sceptical of or opposed to the peace process. This greatly contributes to the Mission's understanding of the political context, in particular on issues such as the transitional justice system, challenges to security and the electoral context. It has impressed on interlocutors that, irrespective of partisan differences, the full reintegration of former combatants into civilian life, the security of communities and the stabilization of areas affected by the conflict are as much a matter of long-term national security as they are a question of peace implementation.

76. The Mission continues to work in close partnership with the United Nations country team at the national and local levels, as well as the international community in Colombia. In addition to continually exchanging information and analysis, the Mission has worked with United Nations entities and donors to mobilize additional support to reintegration efforts.

IV. Mission structures

Mission reconfiguration and operations

77. My Deputy Special Representative, Jessica Faieta (Ecuador), arrived in the Mission on 19 March 2018, replacing Tania Patriota.

78. Currently, the Mission has 311 civilian staff, including 151 women, and 118 international observers from 18 countries, 31 of whom are women. During the reporting period, the Mission vacancy rate was reduced from 35 to 29 per cent for international staff and from 42 to 37 per cent for locally recruited staff.

79. Following the expiration of the ceasefire between the Government and ELN, the 30 Mission teams tasked with its verification ceased all operational activities and the additional 70 international observers authorized for that task were progressively repatriated from 15 January to 3 February.

Mission support

80. During the reporting period, the Mission focused on completing the deployment of its personnel and equipment in Mission headquarters, 10 regional offices, 7 subregional offices and the territorial areas and the withdrawal of its assets that had been provided to teams for monitoring the ceasefire between ELN and the Government from existing resources.

81. For the 25 local sites, temporary camps have been constructed on 15 sites formerly occupied by the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism. Seven of them have office facilities, and eight have combined office and living accommodation. These temporary camps permit the Mission to be deployed in proximity to the territorial areas pending more robust and durable accommodation. The temporary camps established in the sites formerly occupied by the Mechanism

have been equipped with suitable water and wastewater management services, in keeping with guidance of the Department of Field Support on mitigating the Mission's environmental impact. Several sites formerly occupied by the Mechanism have not yet been occupied owing to legal issues with landowners and local communities. In the remaining 10 locations, Mission personnel will commute to the territorial areas from nearby towns, rather than from temporary camps. At the regional and subregional locations, new offices have been identified following the termination of the cost-sharing arrangements of the previous Mission.

Safety and security of United Nations personnel

82. The residual risk levels for the Mission have remained unchanged since the previous report. Nevertheless, in the light of some changes in the threat context, including the expiration of the ceasefire between ELN and the Government, specific measures have been applied to local areas of Mission deployment, including gender considerations. The residual risk levels in relation to the most relevant threats identified, such as kidnapping, crossfire, violent demonstrations, sexual harassment and sexual assault, vary between low and medium.

Conduct and discipline

83. During the reporting period, the Mission continued to strengthen prevention. The Mission organized training sessions for staff at headquarters and in field offices, as well as for civil society representatives. The annual Leadership Dialogue, which was held among staff at Mission headquarters and field staff, provided an additional opportunity to ensure an interactive dialogue on conduct issues, such as sexual exploitation and abuse, harassment in the workplace, abuse of authority in the workplace and conflict of interest.

84. No misconduct cases were reported during the reporting period.

V. Observations

85. The congressional elections held on 11 March were yet another significant step forward in the transition of FARC from weapons to politics and the transition of Colombia from conflict to peace. Participation figures confirm that these elections were the most inclusive in decades, thus enhancing the legitimacy of the electoral results and illustrating one of the ways in which peace is benefiting Colombian democracy. This also shows that the citizens of Colombia are ready and willing to embrace the opportunities from the overall reduction of violence brought about by the peace process. The presidential election is two months away. I call upon the political parties involved in the electoral contest to ensure that violence is further marginalized and a new milestone is reached in the consolidation of peaceful and inclusive politics.

86. The killing of former combatants outside the territorial areas remains a subject of concern. At the same time, progress has been achieved in relation to the security of former combatants living in the territorial areas and their movement outside areas protected by security forces. Coordination and technical issues remain, but the commitment of the National Protection Unit and the security forces is a firm basis from which to expand security guarantees in the coming weeks and months.

87. Socioeconomic reintegration is lagging behind. The transition from early reinsertion to sustainable reintegration has not yet been completed, and this uncertainty continues to undermine the confidence of former members of FARC-EP in their reintegration and in the peace process itself. Some of the fundamentals are being put in place, in particular the legal framework for access to landownership, the

technical studies for the launch of productive projects and the financial regulations enabling dozens of cooperatives established by former combatants to begin to operate. In the next three months, it is essential that all these measures are translated into concrete achievements in the territorial areas and in some of the new settlements where many former combatants have relocated. I welcome the growing interest of the international community in contributing to the success of this key dimension of the peace process.

88. As noted in my previous report and reiterated in the present one, the resurgence of violence in several of the areas most affected by the conflict and the persistent pattern of killings of community and social leaders are the main subjects of concern at present. I welcome that these issues have moved to the centre of the agenda of the President and key institutions of the Colombian state: the Ombudsman, the Attorney General and the Inspector General. A clear national consensus is emerging that unites Colombian institutions and civil society around the protection of the life, work and contributions of community and social leaders, in particular those who promote the substitution of coca crops, the restitution of their land and the protection of their resources and the environment.

89. This consensus is an opportunity for forceful concerted action in the coming period, and the National Commission on Security Guarantees could play a leading part. Some of the success factors can already be identified, including a more collective approach to the protection of populations at risk, the delivery of goods and services in conjunction with the deployment of the security forces to counter the influence of illegal armed groups, and a more robust, better resourced and more coordinated institutional response to the Ombudsman's early warnings. The investigations of the Office of the Attorney General, and in particular its Special Investigation Unit dedicated to the cases of community and social leaders, are called upon to play a decisive role. The successful prosecution of the material and intellectual perpetrators behind the many assassinations in recent years might be the most effective way to underscore the country's determination to do away with violence.

90. The resumption of negotiations between the Government and ELN could contribute to the overall effort to tackle violence and its roots. It will hopefully be accompanied by a de-escalation of the conflict. The parties' agenda, as announced recently, is balanced with respect to its political, military and confidence-building aspects. I look forward to its effective implementation.

91. During my visit to Colombia in January 2018, I stressed that mine was a mission of solidarity with and commitment to the people of Colombia at a historic juncture for the country, Latin America and the world. Ongoing developments in Colombia illustrate both the success factors and the magnitude of the challenges involved in moving from an almost flawless ceasefire and laying down of arms by FARC-EP to the daunting tasks of overcoming a deeply rooted heritage of violence, of addressing illicit economies that fuel violence and of building and sustaining peace through the extension of responsive governance, security and development to the historically marginalized areas of the country, whose citizens have borne the brunt of the conflict. The Mission, the United Nations country team and the United Nations system at large are committed to this effort. At this crucial stage in the Colombia peace process, the international community remains an essential partner, and I encourage it to continue to provide full support to this endeavour.